

ATTAWAYTOGO Goes Way Back

Many people at camp gave me much during the formative years, but two stood out. One was Trigger, a Longhorn institution herself. And the other, Lou Hardin, a quiet, gentle college student discovered by M.F. Lou spent two years on the shores of



Inks Lake and was one of my counselors in the Flamingo cabin during her first year. She sensed then I needed a friend and continued to answer every letter I wrote long after she married and started a family far from the Texas border.

We visited in person once in the mid-eighties when I ventured east of the Hudson all the way to the Charles with my kids. Likewise, a family stop in Huntsville, Alabama (via Disney World) provided a brief catch-up time with Trigger.

The idea for the three of us meeting for a mini-reunion came suddenly. After much high-tech scheduling we finally settled on getting together in Colorado last summer. Though virtual strangers, our Longhorn connection sealed an immediate openness, acceptance and tranquility. How special to experience our camp loyalties after forty plus years. We parted, pledging each other we would meet again at camp ASAP.

In February we convened in Dallas. Trigger at the wheel, Louise riding shotgun and “Thelma” this time, throwing caution and her new “set” to the wind in the backseat, we drove south in Trigger’s convertible. Screeching through the right turn in Burnet, we

were intent in reaching Church Mountain by sunset. We succeeded, or at least it was a tie. More modern than in our days, its simple charm remained and the view in the fading light was still spectacular. Finding the gravesites of Tex, Bob H. and Bob T. provided a powerful moment of reflection.

Back in town, hungrier than we realized, we stopped at “The Maxican”, a favorite with the locals. Owners, Amber and Max, greeted us warmly as returning Longhorn girls. None of us could recall receiving a backrub along with food service, but the matriarch, Mamaw, may be starting a new trend that builds customer loyalty.



Back to camp the next morning, we were given the green light to wander around.

Contrasting the “old and new”, we noticed the swim bay diving tower was unchanged and the fleet of floating cabins now reached well beyond the canoe bay. Mary’s Cabin

still held a familiar magic, yet lacrosse sticks have replaced softballs and bats. No roof on the original Old Faceful probably cut down on the number of demerits handed out. Two story cabins everywhere! How ingenious is that? We took pictures of Trigger by her tree then walked over where the old craft hut used to be. So many changes, yet the heart of everything we loved was so very much intact.

Our trip through the Merit Store reaped a chance to purchase new caps, shirts, jackets, vests, etc. A big hit with all of us was the Chow Hall T-shirt displaying the Sunday lunch fried chicken with all the fixins just as we remembered. We visited briefly

with Donna and Johnny Rob and Robbie. Their spirit of stewardship touched us and we had every sense that TEX would be very proud.

Swinging through downtown Marble Falls, Trigger slowed as we came to the picture show. The last time I was there “Splendor in the Grass” was playing. Trigger recalled the bus trips from camp sitting on mattresses before seats were installed in the bus.

With wise planning we arrived at M.F. and Bill’s in time for lunch, or better yet, feast. We thoroughly enjoyed our time with Lynn and were happy to see Scott. Helen Frady unexpectedly joined us and Guich Koch stopped by too. Time seemed suspended as afternoon conversations never waned. Heartfelt sharing, when the years in between didn’t matter, was interspersed with hilarious accounts of Longhorn misadventures. There was collective gratitude, spoken and implied, for Tex’s inspiration and drive that made our lasting friendships possible.

Unbeknownst to us, darkness fell. Soon M.F. loaded her car with flowers, wine and cheese then herded us down the road to another Johnson “cabin.” The four of us bunked in for a “Golden Girls” slumber party. What a gift, as M.F. shared camp stories we had never heard. Falling back on Longhorn training, we did enforce “lights out.” Could B.J. still be making his rounds?!!

In the dark I knew my mind was still too busy for sleep to be my friend. Mental reels of camp days rolled, so real, I could almost feel the lush St. Augustine grass on my back the way it felt back in the sixties late at night on the baseball field and/or Wren Hill.

My rumination continued.

Years ago Helen Frady asked me to write an article for CLASP. I tried more than once. Each effort ended shortly after the first paragraph when the words dissolved in tears of frustration of “not good enough.”

Most of my life I struggled with the theme of “not good enough.” During my time at Camp Longhorn I absorbed everything positive while privately giving myself the moniker of the atypical “Longhorn girl.” Camp was my safe haven, yet my quiet, aberrant behavior still allowed me a couple of opportunities to “visit” with Tex. Fortunately I woke up and realized what it would take to earn an invitation to be a junior counselor. I committed to make the Wrangler Chief year my best. Successfully earning that invitation was a pivotal moment in my young life where the lessons of determination and initiative were reinforced as never before.

Also the lessons of outrageous fun with the likes of Jumpin’ Joe, Uncle Beanie and Hondo delivering Early Birds, planted the seeds that with a good costume I, too, could get out of myself. Their inspiration, in part, eventually led to my starting a photo line of “dressed-up” greeting cards.

After one more trip down to the bucolic Blue Hole the next morning, our time together came to an end. We drove away grateful for the “place among the hills and dales,” and yes, it still “calls back to you” after all these years.